

Stories about the shortage of stockhands have fallen from the realm of reality. Ranchers have stayed out on their vacant rangelands until they have begun to hate the sight of empty bunkhouses and abandoned saddle racks. Some of the hombres have drifted so far that they are using their wives and small children to call attention to the absence of a working force. In many instances, the bosses' feet are leaving the foot pedals and once again returning to the stirrups.

One Pecos River outfit on the western edge of the Shortgrass Country had to use two preschoolers and their mother to help gather the sheep off 40 sections of wait-a-minute country. (Pecos ranchland is called "wait-a-minute" country because the boys are always saying "wait-a-minute while I get off this rocky ledge.")

Using the lady to round up was a good idea. A whole bunch of those old gals who are raising a ruckus over women's rights ought to have a dose of the Pecos River Valley.

Female meanness is never going to be dampered as long as the girls can sit under air conditioning to discuss their troubles. Men always have been the only ones of the species who could stand idleness without causing a wreck. All womankind has been restless ever since rolling pins and wood stoves became extinct. I remember seeing a picture at the state fair that showed a house wife sitting on a milk stool by a milk cow, and I never will forget the look of utter peace that was on her face.

Pulling those kids so green, however, was a foolish move. Tender hides shouldn't be over-exposed to leather until the wearers have learned to read western novels. Without the support of a good wild west yarn spinner, a youngster can easily see that the life of a cowboy is about as romantic as a swineherd's diary. You can't take a chance on letting a prospective cowboy learn much more than reading, or he'll do something useful with his life, but you sure don't want him to make too big a start toward literacy without some purple sage prose mixed in with a few verbal rides into the sunset.

Cow and sheep herding never would have passed the crook and lute stage if the ancient scribes hadn't colored up the life of a mounted man. The livestock industry in the United States would still be limited to a few dairy herds in New England if pulp paper books hadn't stirred people's imagination. Store tenders and shoe clerks wouldn't have paid six-bits for a ticket to the western banks of the Mississippi without the western pundits to lure them on.

Unsupported by pen and ink, cowboys would have died out before the streets were laid in Chicago. Maybe even before that.

Weaned kids had better be treated gently in this age. Given time to catch the fever, we might raise four or five replacements a year. Schoolmasters would do us a big favor if they'd make cowboy books a required subject.